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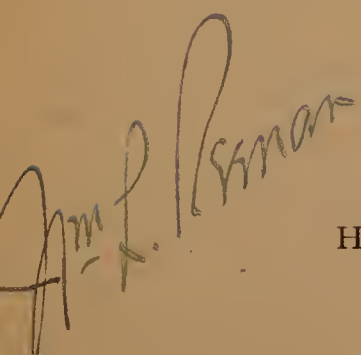
San Antonio de Valero

or

The Alamo

and

Mission San Jose on the San Antonio



By

HELEN BOLLONS NIX

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Foreword

IF a reason be necessary for the writing of another booklet on the Alamo and the Missions, let it be explained forthwith that my reason is the increasing interest displayed by tourists and San Antonians for authentic information and data.

As a native San Antonian with access to a rich collection of old documents and to the manuscripts of "With the Makers of San Antonio" written and compiled by a friend, Mr. Frederick C. Chabot who has spent years of research work in San Antonio and Europe, I feel I am giving the public an authoritative work.

The Author

SAN ANTONIO DE VALERO OR THE ALAMO

It is said that in America there is no such thing as tradition, that only steel girders and paved streets stand as the insignia of reverence. That is not true, for, along with steel girders and paved streets, we have in San Antonio, our monuments of a romantic past, our sacred shrines, which stand as the insignia of reverence, the result of the energy and efficiency of a few.

In the shadow of the towering walls of a modern skyscraper, lies the Alamo, the sacred shrine of Texas history. It is impossible to stand within its confines and fail to be impressed with this great state.

In Spanish Colonial times, the province of Texas, with its governor, was under the jurisdiction of a viceroy whose headquarters were in Mexico City. Though the site of the present San Antonio had been visited by the Spanish expeditions of the 17th century when it was an Indian village at the head waters of the river and springs of the San Pedro, it was not until 1715 that Spanish families were permanently settled here.

In the following year, 1716, Domingo Ramon and his expedition re-established the missions of east

Texas and founded presidios, or military posts for their protection. At this time the *Presidio de San Antonio de Valero* was begun. By 1722 the Marquis of Aguayo, whose expedition had entered Texas in 1719 to drive out the French, had changed the location of this presidio to the site of the present Military Plaza, which was afforded greater protection from the Indians by the loop in the river.

Governor Martin de Alarcon in 1718, organized an expedition for the purpose of officially establishing a *villa* or civil settlement, at San Antonio. The Queretaran friar, Antonio de Olivares, who in 1716 had established a mission in the vicinity of the presidio of San Antonio, which he called *San Antonio de Padua* had charge of the friars of this expedition. In 1718 Father Olivares received official permission to found a mission at San Antonio, so he changed the name of his primitive *San Antonio de Padua* to *San Antonio de Valero* in honor of the viceroy, the Marquis of Valero, who issued the necessary decrees.

At this time (1718) the mission of *San Francisco Solano* which had been founded by Olivares on the Rio Grande at the very beginning of the century, was removed to San Antonio and merged with the mission of San Antonio de Valero. A baptismal entry in the mission records dated July 6, 1719, men-

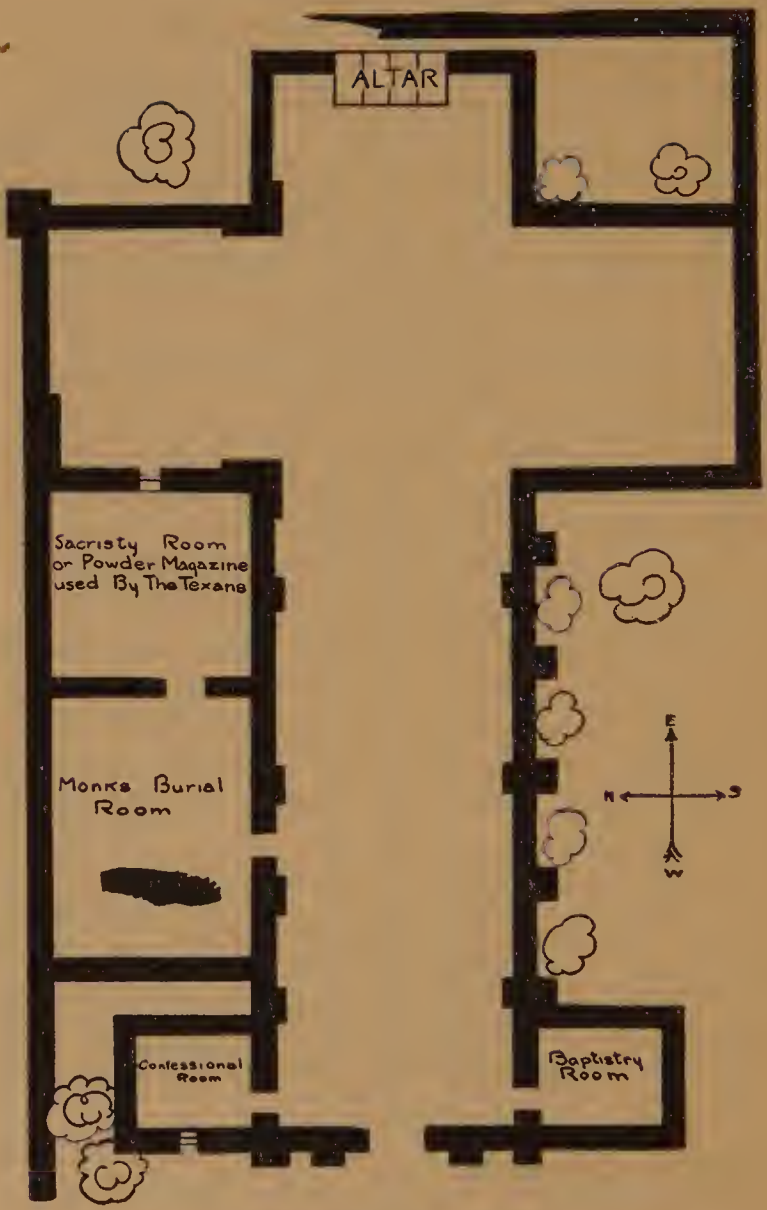
tions for the first time, "this mission of San Antonio de Valero."

In 1724 a wind storm destroyed the jacales or thatched huts which served as church and living quarters. In consequence, the mission was moved to the east side of the river, to the site of the present Alamo Plaza. We find that by 1727 three cells of very good proportions, a gallery and another cell, all of stone and adobe, were built. A convent was then under construction and there was an irrigation system for their fields.

In 1731, when the villa capital of San Fernando was founded by the Canary Island families, the three Queretaran missions, Conception, San Juan and Espada, of east Texas were transferred to their present locations on the San Antonio River.

The corner stone of the new church of the mission of San Antonio de Valero, the present Alamo, was laid March 8, 1744 and the chapel still stands casting its rays of valor, courage and faith out upon a vast moving crowd, which passes daily before its shattered doors.

In 1803 the Company of San Carlos de Parras was stationed at the Mission of San Antonio de Valero, where the old chapel was again used for religious services. (This Mission was secularized in 1793, when its sacred vessels and ornaments were delivered to the parish priest of San Fernando, and



Floor Plan of the Alamo

when the old mission lands were divided and granted to the former mission Indians and the settlers from the Adaes of east Texas.) The records of the Company of San Carlos de Parras begin in 1790, at the *pueblo of San Jose y Santiago del Alamo,* and from this company comes the name Alamo, given to their quarters, the old mission of San Antonio de Valero, of which our present Alamo was the church.

During the exciting times of the Mexican Revolution for Independence, the American or Republican army of the North took Royalist San Antonio (April 1, 1813) and made their headquarters in the Alamo. The Royalist Army under Arredondo

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CONFESSIONAL ROOM: "In this room James Bowie lay ill at the time of the siege; but asking to have his cot lifted across the line drawn by Col. Travis, is said to have met his fate in opposite room."

MONKS BURIAL ROOM AND SACRISTY: "The roof (formerly an arch of stone and adobe) was already in ruins at the time of the siege; yet enough of the walls remained with the aid of the parapets, for the Texans to make a heroic stand, until their ammunition was exhausted. They then retreated to this room, and it was here that the fiercest of the fight took place. When the Mexicans found they could scale the walls in safety, they entered in that way, and also by making a breach in the rear, and blowing open the front door, with powder-blast."

BAPTISTRY ROOM: "Crockett's body was found just inside this doorway, with dead Mexicans piled about him, whom he had slain before giving up his life. The remainder of the garrison loaded and reloaded their own weapons and handed them to him. From this point Travis drew the line with his sword calling upon all who would remain at their post to cross over to him. All except Moses Rose joined him, Bowie being carried over in his cot. Rose later lowered himself by means of blankets down the rear wall and made his escape after fighting had begun in front. But for this fact no account of the beginning of the siege would belong to history, as the two women and negro boy who were spared were in hiding, and only knew the end. The organ loft of solid masonry was over this entrance."

reconquered their ancient stronghold, San Antonio (August 20, 1813) and wreaked vengeance on the unfortunate Republicans. Nearly eight hundred citizens were seized and imprisoned in the Alamo barracks. At this time too, the old Curbello home, known as the *Quinta* (later the first American post office under John Bowen) was made the horrible prison of about six hundred women and girls of Republican families, who were compelled to grind corn for the Royalist army.

After Iturbide, elected Emperor of Mexico in 1822, had been deserted by the army and had abdicated, (1823), the campaigns of the old Spanish Royalists came to an end in New Spain. Santa Anna established a republic in Mexico.

When one stands, head bowed, before the Alamo, the pictures which pass hurriedly before the eyes form a confused panorama of a most unique and individual history. Texas in the days of the past was a vast province of the Republic of Mexico under the dictatorship of Santa Anna. Colonists from the United States came here and settled, first a few and then in greater numbers until at last a body of Colonists was formed. These were the original Texans whose immortal history is written into the stone walls of the Alamo.

When San Antonio fell into the hands of the Texans in December of 1835, the Mexicans lost their

last foot hold in Texas and San Antonio became "the key to the situation," a point to be held at all hazards, because if the Mexicans could re-take and hold it, they could more easily oppose the American colonies. Travis certainly appreciated this fact when he so boldly took his stand with a mere handful of compatriots against the Mexican army. When Santa Anna marched into San Antonio on the afternoon of February 23, (1836) the Texas guard retired into the Alamo which had already been provided as a means of defense, as Colonel Travis had anticipated an attack. Santa Anna immediately demanded a surrender, threatening however, to put the garrison to the sword should they refuse. The Americans answered the summons with a cannon shot and their flag remained waving proudly from the walls.

The indignant Mexican general entrusted the immediate command of the assault to General Castrillon. Santa Anna with part of his staff took his station at a battery south of the Alamo, near the old bridge. "When the hour came, the batteries and music were alike silent and a single blast of the bugle was at first followed by no sound save the rushing tramp of soldiers. The guns of the fortress soon opened upon them and then the bands at the south battery struck up the assassin note *deguello* (no quarters). But a few and not very effective discharges from the works could be made before the enemy was

under them; and it is thought that the worn and weary garrison was not till then fully mustered." With the onrush of the Mexican soldiers, the garrison soon abandoned the outer walls and took refuge in the inner buildings. The main struggle now began. Retreating from point to point was impossible as there were no connections between buildings, and frequently none between the rooms in the same building. The Texans were now attacked by their own guns, and shot after shot crashed through the doors and barricades. "Each ball was followed by a storm of musketry and a charge and thus room after room was carried at the point of the bayonet, when all within them died fighting to the last."

Travis's body was found near the large cannon at the northwest angle. Crockett was shot down in a room of the low barrack, near the gate, where he had taken refuge. "Bowie had been severely hurt by a fall from a platform, and when the attack came on was confined to his bed in the upper room of the barrack at the southeast angle. As the enemy entered the room he shot them down with his pistol. It was here that he was killed on his couch." The church which was carried by *a coup de main* was the last point taken. "Its inmates, like the rest, fought till the last and continued to fire from the upper platform after the enemy occupied the floor of the building. The bayonet soon gleaned what the bullet miss-

ed; and in the upper part of the church the last defender must have fallen."

Subsequent to annexation, various military posts were placed near the Mexican frontier, with small posts or camps about the country; some troops were always stationed in San Antonio. But it was not until after the Mexican War (1846-1848) that a permanent military post was established in San Antonio. The first American troops, after a temporary sojourn in Military Plaza, occupied the Alamo as a quartermaster depot. Major Babbitt continued to hold his office there until 1878 with the exception of the Civil War period.

As early as 1850 the United States held possession of this property, pending a suit between the Catholic Bishop Odin and the city to try title and demurred to a demand from the latter for rent. The suit was won by the Bishop. In 1879 Bishop A. S. Pellicer sold all interest of the Catholic Church in the Alamo, exclusive of the Alamo Church itself, to Honore Grenet for $20,000.00. The Bishop sold the Alamo Church to the state of Texas in 1883 for $20,000.00. In 1886 the firm of Hugo and Schmeltzer purchased the Grenet interest in the Alamo for $28,000.00. This property was subsequently sold to Miss Clara Driscoll for $75,000.00 for the Daughters of the Republic of Texas. The 29th Legislature in 1905 appropriated funds for the purchase of the

property from Miss Driscoll. To-day the Alamo is owned by the state and is a memorial to the men who fell there.

The very stones which had served as foot holds for these heroes of the Alamo bear witness to-day to the host of worshippers who have crossed within. Look down and see how worn and polished these stones are and realize through these many years that this old beaten church has held together through tradition and love the story which is told. No one can escape it who visits the Alamo. No heart can fail to beat a little faster when it feels the greatness of the past flood down upon it through the doorway. No page can tell all of the beautiful stories which are interwoven in its annals. It stands and fortunately will stand to flame again the fire of Texas history.

MISSION SAN JOSE ON THE SAN ANTONIO

A few miles from our modern city stands the Mission of San Jose, against a glowing Texas landscape, with its clustering cacti and graceful feathery huisache. Over its ruins fly the winged horses of the air, whiring the song of modern science to the fallen walls of the old mission, failing to catch the echo which resounds back to the monotonous hum of the motor warning them to love, worship and faith.

The crumbled walls and open sacristy, the exposed ovens and sunlit cloisters envelop the modern atmosphere and transport us back to red skinned Indians toiling to build, supervised by long robed monks reading their *Pater nosters* as the sun fades away below the horizon.

The first mission at San Antonio, we have seen, was founded by the Rev. Father Fray Antonio de Olivares y San Buenaventura in 1716, for the Col-

lege of Queretaro. The second mission on the San Antonio river was founded by the Rev. Father Fray Antonio Margil de Jesus in 1720 for the college of Zacatecas. It was our San Jose.

Antonio Margil de Jesus was a native of Valencia (b-1657). He sailed from Cadiz for Vera Cruz, where he landed in 1683. After varied experiences in Central America, he was recalled to Mexico and served the Nayerites. By 1715, he had organized in the country about Saltillo and Cadereyta, a missionary movement for the province of Texas. In 1716 he joined the Ramon Expedition and founded and served the mission of Guadalupe at Nacogdoches. During the following year (1717) he founded the Dolores mission for the Ayis Indians, and another for the Adays. While in east Texas he administered to the French and reminded them of their religious duties. At the end of 1716 he had been appointed Guardian of the College of our Lady of Guadalupe of Zacatecas, but as the notice of his appointment was not received by him until August 1718, he renounced the office.

With the outbreak of War between the French and Spanish crowns, incursions were made into Spanish territory from the Louisiana side, and as the Spanish forces were very limited, the servants of God retired to the immediate vicinity and protection of the Presidio of San Antonio. Here, "with others of their companions, they made a cloister of the desert,

preaching, and confessing the few soldiers and peaceful Indians; and serving the other priests assisting at mass, even as acolytes." It was at this time (1720), while the illustrious governor, the Marquis of Aguayo was approaching with his expedition, to drive the French from Texas, that Father Margil founded his mission of *San Joseph de San Miguel de Aguayo,* named in honor of the governor.

After the missions in the east were re-established (1721), Father Margil remained at the mission of San Jose on the San Antonio "where he continued to work for the spiritual good of the Indians; and where he continued to till the soil, alone, and with scanty food, which consisted regularly of a little cooked corn, seasoned with bear grease, and natural salt of the earth, when that was found. A bit of chocolate or the black meat of a crow was a great delicacy for the reverend father. His bed consisted of a small spread of black wool, upon the ground, with the gloomy trunk of a tree for his pillow."

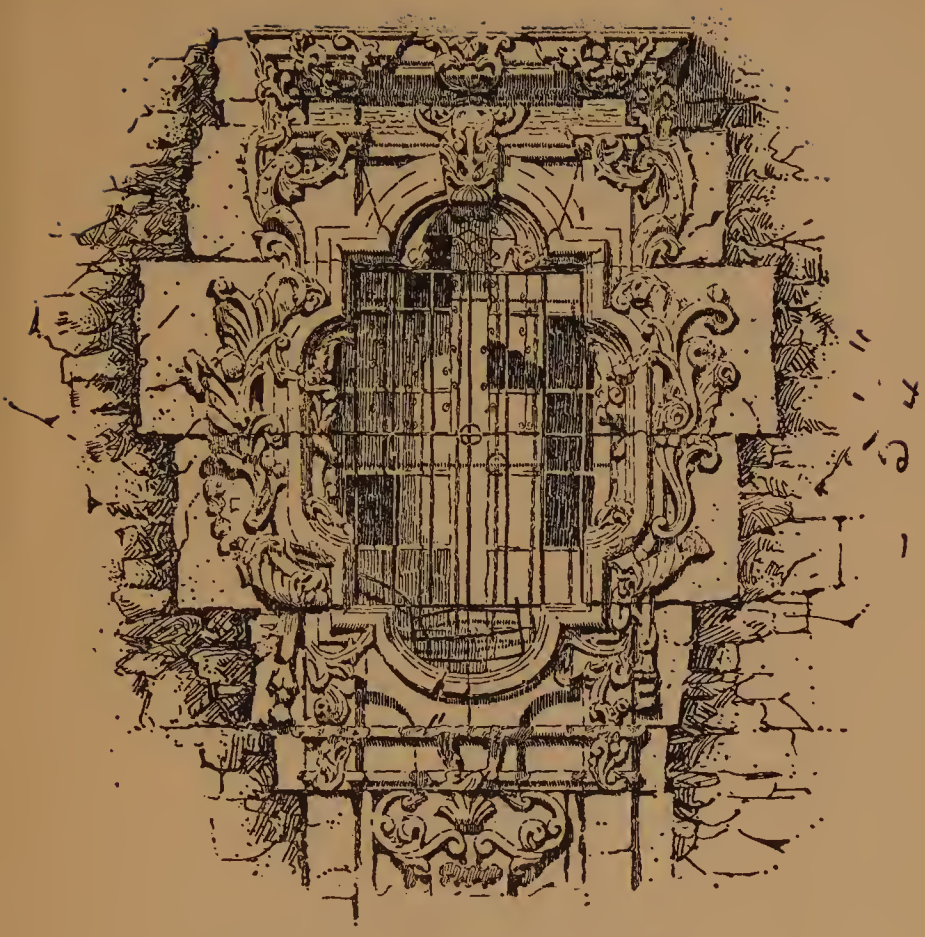
Father Margil compiled a dictionary of the intricate Indian dialects which was a light to lead his companions in the holy service. After his second appointment as Guardian of the College of Zacatecas, he returned to Mexico in 1722.

The kingly mission of San Jose on the San Antonio is a becoming monument to this illustrious career.

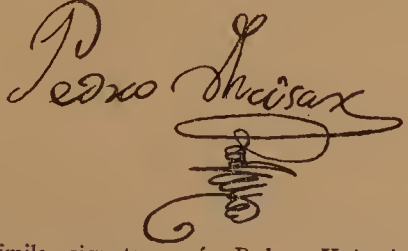
If Mission San Jose excelled in art and beauty, it was also the first to introduce the factories of our modern age. In 1781 its tanneries and other manufactories were held as an example for the other settlements, which De Croix hoped would be interested in the promotion of such enterprises.

In October of 1801, the Rev. Father President of the San Antonio missions, residing at San Jose, reported that the bells of the mission were in very bad condition and that they could not be repaired or replaced owing to the lack of necessary materials. So for the purpose, the governor in San Antonio gave the mission an old bronze cannon which was found in the *Guardia* in San Antonio, and which had been useless for many years.

In the early 1850's, part of the elaborate carving surrounding the doorway, and which extended the whole length of the front, still included numerous figures, among which St. Joseph (San Jose) the patron of the church, and the Virgin and Child were conspicuous. What weather had not slowly destroyed, the numerous military companies found "convenient marks for rifle and pistol. They did not fail to improve the opportunity for showing at the same time their skill in arms and their contempt for the Mexican belief." Where the church was not ornamented with carving, it was with stencil, the colors blue and red predominating.



Rose Window at Mission San Jose



(Facsimile signature of Pedro Huizar)

The plan of the building, it is evident, originally provided for two towers, though only one was ever done. Back of it was a winding stair, forming a spiral in perfect balance. Water spouts projected beyond the walls. The granary was to the left of the gateway. The glittering dome of this majestic structure, shone for more than a hundred miles, and the Indians worshipped it, and called it the Day-Star of their Manitou.

Pedro Huizar, a descendant of a Moorish artist of Seville, it is said, did the carving and painting at San Jose. There is a local tradition that he crossed the seas to make a fortune for the girl he loved, but this took years, and she had not the necessary patience. Just as Huizar was starting for the little Spanish village over there, news of his loved-one's disloyalty came to him. He forfeited his passage and joined the priests who were on their way to the wilds of the province of Texas.

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